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and rain. After the winter rains, the women keep watering the tiny plants and fertilize them regularly. The chemical fertilizer which is provided by the Agricultural Bank requires careful handling. Women explain that too much fertilizer will burn the tender plants, and they take pride in their success in applying just the right amount. Conversely, they ridicule any unfortunate woman who is so unskillful as to have burned her plants. As the tobacco plants grow and the weather gets warmer, occasional rains make worms and snails a hazard in the seed bed. In March and April, at dusk, women are seen stooping at the seed beds collecting and killing these parasites.

The winter of 1955–1956 was an unusually cold and long one, and Vasilika still had some snow in March. Many households had to plant tobacco three or four times in the course of the winter and spring, and several households ran out of seed. The abnormal weather with flooding rains in March and no rain for much of April delayed transplanting. Ordinarily, the tobacco plants are about four inches high in early April, and can be transplanted then. By that time, the fields are usually sufficiently well drained and yet still have enough moisture for the tobacco to "catch" as the villagers put it. In the spring of 1956, the fields were too dry by the time the tobacco was ready for transplanting. Some households resorted to carrying water from the wells, a gallon can at a time, making a hole with a small steel hook, pouring a small amount of water into the hole, and then placing the young tobacco plant into it. Everyone was thoroughly disgusted with the back-breaking and tedious labor, not normally connected with the tobacco crop, and men and women alike (both work at transplanting) were vociferous in their complaints. Tobacco, here, needs no irrigation. Therefore, although some of the farmers were willing to put their pumps into operation to irrigate the tobacco fields during this extraordinarily dry season, most of the tobacco fields were too far from the irrigation wells to make that entirely feasible.

Usually in late June or early July, the outer leaves of the tobacco are ready to be picked. Both men and women work at plucking the three or four outer leaves of the plants, and then sit in family groups on the ground in the shade stringing the leaves in preparation for hanging them over the canes. This kind of work normally follows the hoeing of cotton and is especially welcome. As we would pass from one part of the village to another, at this time, we would hear exclamations of satisfaction and enjoyment as people explained what a relief it was to be able to work out of the hot sun, near their houses, and sitting down besides. The tobacco stringing is a job in which even very young children can help, and they sit with the adults piercing with holes the tobacco leaves through which their elders eventually pass the string. Throughout the summer, periods of cotton hoeing alternate with periods of tobacco cutting and stringing.

Once strung, the tobacco is hung up to dry on frames which are set up on poles out of doors. A tobacco growers' association has recently distributed canvas shelters to prevent the soaking of the leaves by unexpected summer rains. When no such canvas is available, the tobacco is taken inside the barns each

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night. In October, the dried tobacco is pressed into bales by machines the farmers have for the purpose, and is then ready for sale.

A farmer can get 720 *okadhes* of tobacco from 6 *stremata* of land, and if he succeeds in selling the entire crop at 30 drachmas an *oka*, he receives the equivalent of $720. This is a very good income, indeed, especially when it is added to that derived from cotton.

Vasilika farmers are obviously in need of some capitalization to finance what have become considerable investments necessary for producing their wheat, cotton, and tobacco. Whether or not the farmers' savings would be adequate to finance their crops, the fact is that Vasilika farmers do not want to use their accumulated savings to invest in their own farms. Cash drachma savings are exchanged for gold English sovereigns or French or Italian specie, which accumulations are then set aside for the dowries of the girls of the family or to pay for the education of a son. The only notable exception to this use of savings is that the farmer who becomes wealthy enough to feel that his obligations to his children are taken care of may buy land if the opportunity presents itself. At the same time that the farmer does not want to spend savings on the current production of his crops, he is eager for an increased cash income to secure the future of his children. Increased cash income is possible only through investment in his farm. How does he get out of the dilemma? He willingly accepts credit from the Agricultural Bank of Greece. In addition, farmers accept from the bank the needed seed, artificial fertilizers, and chemical weed killers and insect sprays. March is the month in which the loans are made by the bank, so that the farmers always receive their money before Easter. Both the manager of the Agricultural Bank in Levadhia and we were aware of the fact that some of the money was used for Easter finery and Easter feasting. We had the impression that the farmers considered the loan as cash income to be spent as they wished. The repayments of principle and interest due in October were viewed by the farmers as something like an additional expense or tax chargeable against current income from the produce, and in this sense, not as expenditure of savings.

## Miscellaneous Crops

Each household maintains a small kitchen garden near the cotton fields. This location permits the farmers to irrigate and to tend to the garden at the same time they work with the cotton. Both men and women work in the gardens to raise tomatoes, eggplant, cucumbers, squash, and melons of various kinds, but only to the extent necessary for immediate consumption by the household and its hired farm labor through the growing season. No effort is made to produce surplus for canning or for any other kind of home processing. Besides the summer vegetable gardens, in the early spring, the women of a few households fence off a rectangular area near the houses and plant spring onions, lettuce, spinach, and a type of lima bean called *kukya*. The wire or reed fenc-

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ing keeps out both animal and human thieves. These small plots are not carefully tended and their produce is consumed in a few weeks.

Some mention of the most important vegetable food for the villagers may be included: the wild greens (*khorta*) that grow at the edges of the fields and on the hillside. Collecting the greens, which entails finding, recognizing, and cutting them close to the ground with a small knife, is another task of the women and young girls. Some greens are available all year round and children can collect them when the women are busy. However, on occasion, even men and boys will gather a few on their way home from the fields. *Khorta* are not served every day by any means, but they are a fairly common article of diet.

Some fruit trees are cultivated on the village lands. One farmer has as many as ten apricot trees in his cotton fields, but most have a cherry tree or two in the vineyard, perhaps several fig and peach trees in the wheat fields, and an occasional pear, quince, pomegranate, and mulberry tree on some other holdings. The fruits are eaten as they ripen, except that the women prepare from some of them the sweet preserves which are a necessary adjunct of village hospitality. Homemade *gliko kutalyu* (sweet jam) usually lasts through to midwinter, but after that, the villagers buy what they need.

Home canning or other food preservation, therefore, is not a significant addition to the annual locally produced food supply in Vasilika. Even the recognized need for more fruit preserves has not impelled the women to try to convince their husbands to increase the size of orchards. Tomato paste is an important condiment in village cooking, but again, the farming households buy the commercially canned paste, and the women do not prepare any themselves, although, as we have seen, they raise some tomatoes.

Government agricultural extension agents made an effort in 1954 to convince the young girls to can pears and plums as part of a competition. The government recommended fruit canning to the rural women for several reasons: to improve the winter diet without additional cost, and to encourage the increased cultivation of fruit trees as one means of improving drainage on the land. But there has been no increase in canning or in fruit production, and by 1959, even the prize certificates, which had been displayed on a wall of the *saloni* of the house in 1955 and had drawn our attention to the campaign, had disappeared. When asked, the farmers say they could not adequately guard so many trees and the ripe fruit might be stolen. "Why should our family raise fruit for others to eat?" they said. They shrug their shoulders at the soil drainage argument.

The effect of planting fruit trees is, of course, not immediately visible, nor could an eventual improvement in drainage, if it did occur, be an obvious demonstration of the efficacy of orchards, for the cause-and-effect relationships between the two might be obscured, for the farmers, by all the other variables which affect drainage. The reluctance to embark on long-range improvements which are backed by abstract scientific knowledge not directly observable in the farmer's own experience is in direct contrast to his willingness to try short-range experiments the results of which are easily and immediately demonstrable. Indeed, in 1955, the school teacher was criticized for having the school children

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175 792 346 the wife of the Despot of Ioannina, whose brother, Ioasaph, had come to Staghi as a postulant in 1388. By the sixteenth century there would seem to have been as many as twenty-four communities scattered about the rocks.

The convent of St. Stephen, built on the site of a hermitage founded in 1312, lies on the farther side of a chasm spanned by a drawbridge. [406] In order to gain access to most of the monasteries, however, it was necessary to be hoisted in a net lowered from the gate-house of the monastery (commonly situated some 150 feet above the farthest point [417] to which the traveller could attain by his own unaided efforts), or to clamber up ladders somewhat imperfectly secured by long wooden pegs to the face of the precipice. Travellers' accounts abound in references to the perils of either means of ascent: to frayed ropes which were replaced only after a catastrophe had actually occurred, and to the horrors of ladders hung perpendicularly upon the face of the cliff, below which, as Curzon relates: "the precipice went sheer down to so tremendous a depth, that my head turned when I surveyed the distant valley over which I was hanging in the air like a fly on a wall." It was not until 1925 that, as the result of the construction of some rough tunnels and steps, it became possible to reach the four monasteries then inhabited without considerable hazard to life and limb. The alterations then effected are bitterly lamented by the present *Igoumenos* of the Great Meteoron, the Archimandrite Callinicos, as a misguided concession to episcopal infirmity on the part of his predecessor. It seemed very [406] doubtful, however, whether the combined energies of the few remaining monks would suffice to operate their ancient windlass at all effectively. Curzon (who visited the Meteora in 1834) speaks of the ten or twelve monks at Aghia Trias who pulled him up to their monastery with a rope thirty-two fathoms long, and of the like number of reverend stevedores who assembled at the bars of the capstan at St. Barlaam, and whose efforts had the somewhat disconcerting effect of lifting him off the floor in his net and launching him "out of the door right into the sky, with an impetus which kept me swinging backwards and forwards at a fearful rate". To-day, the largest community can muster no more than half a dozen monks, of whom two are well advanced in years.

A great transformation has indeed come about since the days of prosperity vividly depicted in an old print which hangs in the sadly dilapidated guest-chamber of the Great Meteoron. More than twenty

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monasteries are there represented, each one inaccessible on its rock. Wayfarers seeking hospitality strive to attract the notice of monastic porters, remote and unheeding in their aerial gate-houses. Venerable bearded figures in flowing black robes dangle in nets above the abyss, or swing with grave and solemn motion upon rope-ladders; while their brethren labour unceasingly at windlasses and capstans high above the earth, and hoist provisions, firewood and travellers to their fastnesses among the rocks.

The Thebaid of Staghi to-day presents a very different picture: no more than four of the original twenty-four foundations are now inhabited. The history of the monasteries from the sixteenth century onwards is one long record of steadily declining numbers. There were interminable struggles for supremacy between the abbots of the Great Meteoron and the superiors of the hermitage of Panaghia Doupiani, who strove to retain their ancient title of 'Father of the ascetics of Staghi'. Discord rent the communities, there were disputes concerning the lands belonging to the monasteries, and before long the number of those inhabited was reduced to fourteen. The English travellers Holland and Hughes, who paid brief visits to the Meteora during the early part of the nineteenth century, found only ten remaining. During the further twenty years that elapsed before the advent of the Hon. Robert Curzon with his escort of brigands three more convents were abandoned.

As late as 1830 many of the caves which mark the perpendicular rock face were apparently inhabited: though whether by hermits or, as seems more probable, by refugees, is not entirely clear. Urquhart describes these cave-dwellings: some "like handsome houses, with regular landing-places, windows and projecting balconies", others, the smaller and meaner ones, "shut in with basket work, with a hole to enter by", and reached by curious ladders hanging like chains, some of which were drawn up when their lord and master was installed in his aerial dwelling; while those which were longer and gave access to the more elevated among the caves were pulled up fifteen or twenty feet from the ground and let down with "a strange clattering noise". All have been swept away and only the dark holes in the face of the cliff remain. By 1911 only thirty-eight monks were left, dispersed among four communities: the Great Meteoron, Aghios Barlaam, Aghios Stephanos and Aghia Trias. A monk from the Belgian monastery of Amay, who visited the Meteora in 1931, found the number of the